

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) continued his advocacy for increased benefits for our nation's veterans by supporting the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform & Transparency Act, and the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act. The Congressman, who recently gathered with thousands at the "Walk for the Wounded" in Media, PA to benefit disabled Veterans and hosted his third Veterans Summit, supported this legislation as an important part of his efforts to improve healthcare services.

"We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the brave men and women who wore the cloth of this nation and to the families that supported them," said the Congressman. "Our government has not always fairly recognized their service, such as when thousands of Veterans who could not afford healthcare were ruled ineligible for the VA system in 2003. We have done better in the last few years and I am particularly proud of the work Veterans Committee Chairman Bob Filner and I did to make it possible for many of these "Priority 8" Veterans to now enroll in that VA system. However, there is much work to be done. These three bills, which include provisions to increase disability compensation for Veterans from every era of combat, allocate VA funding far enough in advance to allow for the best possible use of resources, and expand healthcare for newborns of female Veterans, are another significant step toward ensuring all our Veterans receive the benefits they have earned."

To increase the amount paid to Veterans for disability compensation, and to their survivors for dependency and indemnity compensation, Congressman Sestak cosponsored the House version of and helped pass the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009 (S 407). Each year, Congress reviews Veterans' service-connected disability compensation, as well as dependency and indemnity compensation programs for surviving spouses and dependent children, to make sure that such benefits provide reasonable and adequate compensation. The Veterans Affairs (VA) Department estimates that it will provide disability compensation under the Act to more than 3 million Veterans with service-connected disabilities in Fiscal Year 2009. Among the Veterans estimated to receive such compensation are two World War I Veterans; 267,250 World War II veterans; 157,690 Korean-conflict veterans; 1,031,410 Vietnam-era veterans; 956,090 veterans of the Persian Gulf War era; and 602,399 veterans who served during peacetime. The VA currently rates the disabilities on a graduated scale ranging from 10 percent to 100 percent, in 10 percent increments, and the bill allows a Veteran with a disability rated at 30 percent or greater to receive additional compensation on behalf of the Veteran's spouse, children, and dependent parents.

Congressman Sestak also voted to support the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform & Transparency Act (HR 1016), which he cosponsored. The bill would authorize appropriations for VA medical care programs one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year. An advance

appropriation would provide the VA with up to one year in which to plan how to deliver the most efficient and effective care to an increasing number of Veterans with increasingly complex medical conditions. Specifically, the bill would provide advanced funding for multiple medical services including medical support and compliance, and medical facilities. Among other provisions, it would require the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study of the adequacy and accuracy of the budget projections for VA health care expenditures and require an annual report to Congress by each July 31 from the VA detailing cost estimates.

The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act (HR 1211), which the Congressman also cosponsored, targets the needs of female Veterans, especially those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, there are approximately seven million women Veterans, totaling seven percent of the nearly 25 million Veterans. Assuming that current enrollment rates remain the same, the number of female Veterans who use the VA system will double in the next five years, making female Veterans one of the fastest growing subgroups of Veterans.

This bill specifically seeks to expand and improve health care services available to women Veterans by first requiring the VA to implement a study on health care barriers and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the VA's health care programs for female Veterans. The bill would notably provide medical care for newborn children of women Veterans receiving maternity care. It authorizes a pilot program for child care assistance to certain Veterans receiving health care services at VA facilities. In addition, the bill requires training and certification for VA mental health care providers who provide care for Veterans suffering from sexual trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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